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ABSTRACT

Conflict is defined by the authors as a struggle over scarce status, power, and resources. They discuss the role of communication as one of the several strategies leading to conflict and as a potential strategy leading to conflict resolution. First, there is tacit communication, wherein the participants are engaged not in face-to-face interactions but in achieving a mutual goal; agreement, or success, is dependent on the interacting factors of culture and knowledge of the other's probable response. Second, there is implicit communication, the expression of intent to perform some act and the subsequent bargaining, which involves three methods of influence: persuasion, inducement, and constraint; the variables associated with conflict resolution include trust, defection, agreement, negotiation, and commitment. Finally, there is ideal explicit communication, showing confidence between the participants and correct interpretation of acts among the participants, and imperfect explicit communication, with attitudes of distrust and misinterpretations of acts among the participants. All three forms of communication interact with one another in almost every conflict situation. (RN)

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METHODS FOR INTRODUCING ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT THEORY

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METHODS FOR INTRODUCING ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT THEORY

Most speech educators recognize the increasing importance of helping their students become aware of the role of communication in conflict situations. The purpose of this paper is to define conflict and communication from a framework that allows simplified introduction of conflict and persuasion theory into the classroom through a series of exercises designed to aid the student in recognizing the role of communication in conflict resolution.

Conflict situations tend to be either ignored by authors within our field or viewed as chaotic, irrational actions. Some have noted that conflict and the common strategies associated with conflict require means, and sometimes ends, that are opposite the ideals of communication. More specifically, those principals whose modes of persuasion center on conflict are defined, by some in our field, as despots[1] or totalitarians.[2] Even when value judgments are not made, the most consistent view of conflict from the speech professional's perspective is that conflict situations can best be studied by isolating the oral messages within the incident.[3] From this view stems the limited concept that conflict resolution develops from open channels of communication.[4] However, conflict involves more communication elements than just the oral and often limited formal messages. Conflicts range from international politics where there are wars and threats of war, to classrooms where there is competition for grades, to the weekly football games where highly institutionalized and symbolic forms of conflict are inacted.[5]

For the purposes of this paper, we define conflict as a struggle over scarce status, power, and resources.[6] Conflict behavior should be considered essentially a bargaining strategy[7] not necessarily limited to explicit concessions, and conflict resolution should be considered negotiated resolution. The advantages of this view are multiple and will become more obvious with further development. Two primary advantages should be emphasized here: (1) conflict can develop over intangibles (power and status) as well as tangibles (resources); and (2) recognizing conflict as requiring bargaining strategies reminds us that conflict occurs when interests are not always totally divergent. Often we are in conflict and still share mutual goals. The latter advantage introduces the concept of mixed-motives[8] where cooperation and competition exist in the same conflict situation.

With such definitions, it would be misleading to consider communication as the only element involved in a conflict situation. Communication represents one of several strategies leading to conflict, and communication may not always be the best strategy leading to conflict resolution. We define three possible forms of communication in the conflict situation: tacit, implicit, explicit. Each form of communication will be delineated within the context of conflict in the following sections, and exercises for demonstrating the communication dynamics will be suggested.

I

Tacit communication is often defined as "no communication" because the participants do not directly engage in face-to-face interactions.[9] However, by strict definition, if the participants are engaged in achieving a mutual goal and depend on each other's actions to achieve that goal, then communication of some form can be said to exist.

Tacit bargaining is Thomas Schelling's term[10] to identify those situations of conflict calling upon cultural and situational factors to coordinate conflict resolution among the participants. Schelling gives numerous examples of how this type of communication can be demonstrated in the classroom. We cite a few examples here to illustrate tacit communication:[11]

(1) You and another person you know are to meet in Grand Central Station in New York City, but you did not agree on the hour of the meeting. You both must guess the exact minute of the day for the meeting.

(2) Circle one of the following numbers listed. You and another person you know win if you both circle the same number without consultation with each other. The numbers are: 7, 100, 13, 99, and 55.

(3) You and another person you know are each given a piece of paper one of which is marked with an "X" and one which is blank. The one who gets the blank sheet has the choice of leaving it blank or writing an "X" on it. The one who gets the "X" piece has the choice of leaving it alone or erasing the "X". If when you have made your choice, there is an "X" on only one of the sheets, the holder of the "X" gets $3.00 and the holder of the blank gets $2.00. If both sheets have "X's" or both sheets are blank, neither person gets anything. Your sheet of paper has the original "X" on it. Do you leave it alone or erase it?

In these three problems tacit agreement is dependent on two interacting factors--culture and knowledge of the other person's probable response. From the cultural channel, we know the majority of people answer the first problem "twelve noon," the second problem "100," and the third problem by leaving the "X".

The overriding channel of tacit communication, however, is knowledge of the other's probable response. Yet knowledge of the other's probable response is contaminated by the participants' attempts to account for <u>each other's</u> probable response. Known as an infinite regress, we find

tacit communication is thinking about your choice about his choice about your choice--and so on to infinity. In spite of this possibility, we have found from numerous tests of these and other similar problems a very high agreement ratio indicating the influence of tacit communication in conflict and conflict resolution.

II

The second form of communication found in the conflict situation we identify as implicit communication. Implicit communication is the expression of intent to perform some act. The bargaining that takes place within implicit communication introduces a wide variety of concepts important to the study of conflict.

Since implicit communication is an intent, influence of the other participants is central to the concept. All means of influence are symbolic.[12] Implicit communication and bargaining depend on the means of symbolic influences used. William Gamson[13] identifies three means of influence: persuasion, inducement, and constraint. These are three means of influence that will occur within implicit communication channels. What becomes of interest to the speech professional is the manner and conditions in which these factors are used. Both Gamson and Talcott Parsons make hypothetical statements about their use. Additionally, implicit communications depend on the power relationship of the participants.

Given power relationships in conflict, strategy becomes very important. There are a number of simple exercises that will help the speech educator demonstrate implicit communication and the strategies associated with it.

"Split-The-$100" is an exercise typical for demonstrating power relationships, establishing influence attempts, and for exploring the perishableness of commitment within implicit communication channels.[14]

For the exercise, three teams are formed and given the task of dividing a $100 prize. The prize will be awarded to the two teams who reach agreement on how the $100 will be split. Each team can send a bargaining representative to any other team offering a proposed agreement. No two representatives from different teams can appear before the same group simultaneously. All negotiations are kept secret at the discretion of the teams involved. Once any two teams reach agreement, and they consider such agreement the final and binding agreement, the game is over.

The dynamics of the exercise usually begin with two teams agreeing on a 50-50 split. The third team, being left out, then finds they can afford to take some loss in order to gain a little something. They usually offer something on the order of a 40-60 split to one of the other teams. Accounting for greed, this means that one of the originally agreeing teams has been left out. They now face the decision of offering a larger share to the favored team in the last agreement (such as 30-70) or approaching the weaker team and offering a 50-50 split. Practice with this exercise has demonstrated that some time limit must be established since there is more likelihood of not reaching agreement than for a binding agreement to be established.

Observe the number of variables associated with conflict and conflict resolution that develop from this simple exercise. Among the variables should be: trust, defection, agreement, persuasion by negotiation, coalition development, threats and promises, and commitment. Crucially, this exercise underscores that none of these eight variables can absolutely be predicted or guaranteed through implicit communication.

Translating beyond this exercise, we find the same problems exist in domestic and international conflicts. Peace negotiations in Vietnam

provide a recent example. The United States and North Vietnam could conclude a "50-50" treaty which would remove American troops quickly and allow the North Vietnamese great freedom of action after American withdrawal. Faced with this possibility, the South Vietnamese would be forced to negotiate with one of the two countries to try and change the split. Perhaps Saigon could offer the United States a sure victory in a few months and attempt to leave the North out of any agreement. In any event, the process of negotiation over alliances where three parties must divide limited resources occurs in varied degrees in many conflict situations.[15] The general principle evolves from the theory of alliances. This theory attempts to determine why alliances form, why the division is as it is, and why alliances break up.[16]

III

Ideal explicit communication is the presentation of unequivocable meaning. Whereas implicit communication was an expression of intent, explicit communication is action performed. There are two considerations to be given explicit communication: (1) ideal explicit communication where a relationship of confidence exists among the participants and acts by any participant are correctly interpreted by the other participants; and (2) imperfect explicit communication where a trust relation is not developed among the participants and acts by one of the participants are not correctly interpreted by the other participants.

For classroom use we suggest a couple of exercises that demonstrate the dynamics of explicit communication in a conflict situation. The "Prisoner's Dilemma" is a game rich in conflict strategies. In the Prisoner's Dilemma, as originally established, two prisoners are brought

to a police station and placed in separate rooms. Each is told that he has two alternatives: to confess to a crime the police are sure they have committed or not to confess.[17] Figure I displays the results from each prisoner's choice. Repeated trials of the game tend to introduce the dynamics of "gain" and "preservation" which ultimately lead to a display of the range of elements from conflict theory normally associated with the game. A simple matrix can be set up for the actions describing the

FIGURE I

		Prisoner A	
		Confesses	Does Not Confess
Prisoner B	Confeses	Both A and B get less than maximum sentence for the major charge	A gets maximum sentence B gets lenient treatment
	Does Not Confess	A gets lenient treatment B gets maximum sentence	Both A and B get off with light sentences on minor charges

motivations in a given conflict. Three basic conflict situations emerge: (1) gain-gain; (2) gain-preservation; and (3) preservation-preservation.[18] As figure II shows, the gain-gain situation occurs when individuals seeking

FIGURE II

		Player A	
		Gain	Preservation
Player B	Gain	Gain-Gain	Gain-Preservation
	Preservation	Preservation-Gain	Preservation-Preservation

a particular benefit are brought into conflict with each other. The gain-preservation situation assumes players with different motivations. For one player to win, the other must be worse off than he was at the beginning of the game. Therefore, the motivation of each player is not only to win, but also to lose as little as possible if winning does not occur. Income legislation is an example of where players, in this case taxpayers, can both win and lose depending on the outcome.

The preservation-preservation conflict is the most difficult to comprehend. In this case, neither player is trying to win from the other player but simply wishes to guarantee his own safety. Perhaps the best example would be any arms race between two countries. Although neither country apparently plans any immediate aggression, each country reacts to the other's military moves with corresponding moves of their own. Most of the theory of deterrence is based on the preservation principle.

These theoretical aspects can be richly demonstrated in class through the use of successive trials of the Prisoner's Dilemma Game. Figure III typifies a payoff matrix for Prisoner's Dilemma when used as an in-class exercise. Successive choices of red or blue are made simultaneously by

FIGURE III

		Player A	
		Red	Blue
Player B	Red	1,1	-5,8
	Blue	8,-5	-1,-1

the participants. Upon repeated trials a pattern of responses should begin to develop. The payoff is determined by the combined choices so that each player exercises behavioral control[19] over the other. This power relationship is known as bi-lateral.[20]

As an example of explicit communication, Prisoner's Dilemma is an excellent exercise since each move is fulfillment of action.[21] Red is identified as an essentially cooperative choice and blue is an essentially competitive choice. Since trust relationships are formed to develop within the game, several conflict theory dynamics can be illustrated. Among the prominent dynamics are: (1) the participant's perception of the game (does he see it as a competitive or cooperative exercise?); (2) the participant's perception of the other (is the other to be trusted?; will he cooperate or compete?; if he cooperates will he defect?); and (3) the participant's perception of himself.[22]

It should be noted that Prisoner's Dilemma accounts for the explicit communication condition where no trusting relation exists. Although a red choice is essentially a cooperative choice, neither player can assume that cooperation is the reason for the choice. For example, the red choice may signal that a threat or promise has been effective but that a cooperative position of trust has not been developed. This would allow the instructor to use the exercise for the introduction of theories of attitude change.[23] Furthermore, the cooperative choice may be a result of either high or low levels of utility, both of which could justify a repeated use of the cooperative choice. If this is the case, a discussion of utility theory is worthy of consideration as a factor of conflict resolution.[24]

Variations of the Prisoner's Dilemma yield differing strategic choices within the conflict situation.[25] If the number of trials are increased, the the participants have to decide whether they want long-term gains or short-term gains and what each position means to the operating and developing relationship.[26] If the matrix payoff is altered, brinkmanship can be introduced.[27]

As a demonstration of brinkmanship we suggest the game of "Chicken."[28] Figure IV shows the payoff matrix for the game of "Chicken." In this configuration, note the blue choice is the better choice if the other player can be made to choose red. The strategy to accomplish that shift is part of the reason the game is called "Chicken." Consider two black-leather jacketed high school dropouts in their souped-up 1957 Chevys racing toward each other each with two sets of wheels on the centerline of the highway. As they near each other they face the ultimate decision of staying with their decision or veering away. If they both stay they both lose. If one veers, he loses the game while the other wins. According to our previous discussion, no implicit communication can verify that one player or the other will really maintain his position. Only through explicit communication can assurance be given a commitment. Imagine one player's surprise when the other rips the steering wheel from the car and throws it out the window. In the game this would be tantemount to tearing up the red decision card and leaving only the blue. We ask: "Isn't that sort of explicit commitment as close to a perfect trusting position as one can get?" In terms of real-world events, the fail-safe device on our nuclear bombers that locks in once a certain point has been reached is an explicit communication to our enemies of commitment.

FIGURE IV

Chicken

		Player A	
		Red	Blue
Player B	Red	1,1	-2,2
	Blue	2,-2	-3,-3

IV

The preceding exercises demonstrate the various types of communication possible in a conflict setting. For purposes of explanation we have implied that the three forms of communication within the conflict situation are on a continuim and, therefore, are distinct from each other. More realistically, all three forms of communication interact with each other in almost every conflict situation. In fact, the separation of the three is only useful for demonstration purposes. The interaction of the three modes of communication may also complicate the conflict situation as Erving Goffman demonstrates in Strategic Interaction.[29] The speech teacher will want to emphasize the interrelatedness of these types of communication and their possible effects on each other.

One of the difficulties of studying conflict has been obtaining the dynamics of a conflict situation without the potential damage of real conflict. The discussion presented here provides a means to demonstrate the various aspects relevant to understanding and dealing with conflict and still maintain the hypothetical nature of the exercises.

The games and simulations give the student the opportunity to understand conflict by actively participating in a conflict inducing situation. The power of this type of exercise was emphasized by Marshall McLuhan in War and Peace in the Global Village. "Real play, like the whodunit, throws the stress on process rather than on product, giving the audience [in this case students] the chance of being a maker rather than a mere consumer."[30]

Perhaps Anatol Rapoport provides the most legitimate rational for studying conflict and using these exercises in the classroom:

I suspect that the most important result of a systematic and many-sided study of conflict would be the changes which such a study could effect in ourselves, the conscious and unconscious, the willing and unwilling participants in conflicts. Thus, the rewards to be realistically hoped for are the indirect ones, as was the case with the sons who were told to dig for buried treasure in the vinyard.[31] They found no treasure, but they improved the soil.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Wayne Minnick, The Art of Persuasion, 2nd ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), p. 5.

[2]Kenneth Anderson, Persuasion, Theory and Practice, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971), p. 336.

[3]See Robert Scott and Wayne Brockriede, The Rhetoric of Black Power, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

[4]William Brooks, Speech Communication, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1971), p. 297.

[5]An insightful analysis of the types and models of conflict is provided by Kenneth E. Boulding, Conflict and Defense: A General Theory, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962).

[6]Lewis Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, (New York: The Free Press, 1956), Chapter III.

[7]Thomas Schelling, The Strategy of Conflict, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 5.

[8]Any time the interactionists' motives are not diametrically opposed but are seeking to win or lose unequal amounts according to their respective utility we define the condition as mixed-motive and the situation as a non-zero-sum game.

[9]For such a definition of "no communication" see: Fred Jandt, "The Simulation of Social Conflict," (Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Conference on Communication and Conflict, March 2-4, 1972, Temple University), p. 1.

[10]Schelling, p. 53. A further explanation of Schelling's theory as communication imposed onto a game is provided by Anatol Rapoport, Strategy and Conscience, (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), pp. 111-124.

[11]Schelling, pp. 56, 61.

[12]Talcott Parsons, "On The Concept of Influence," Public Opinion Quarterly, 27 (1963), pp. 37-62.

[13]William Gamson, Power and Discontent, (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1968), pp. 163-183.

[14]William Ruher and Richard Niemi, "Anonymity and Rationality in the Essential Three-Person Game," Human Relations, 17 (1964), pp. 131-141.

[15]For a similar study of negotiations see Wolf Mendl, Deterrence and Persuasion, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

[16]Michael Nicholson, Conflict Analysis, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), pp. 86-102.

[17]R. Duncan Luce and Howard Raiffa, Games and Decision, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1957), p. 95.

[18]Paul H. Conn, Conflict and Decison Making: An Introduction to Political Science, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 33-45.

[19]J. W. Thibaut and H. H. Kelley, The Social Psychology of Groups, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1959).

[20]J. C. Harsanyi, "The Measurement of Social Power," Behavioral Science, 7 (1962), pp. 67-72.

[21]For fuller discussion of the role of communication in the Prisoner's Dilemma see: Anatol Rapoport and C. Orwant, "Experimental Games: A Review," Behavioral Science, 7 (1962), pp. 1-37; Harvey Wichman, "Effects of Isolation and Communication on Cooperation in a Two-Person Game," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 16 (1970), pp. 114-120.

[22]See Harold Kelley and Anthony Stahelski, "Social Interaction Basis of Cooperators' and Competitors' Beliefs About Others," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 16 (1970), pp. 66-91; and I. D. Steiner, "Interpersonal Behavior as Influenced by Accuracy of Social Perception," Psychological Review, 62 (1955), pp. 268-274.

[23]Arthur Cohen, Attitude Change and Social Influence, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1964).

[24]For a discussion of utility see Luce and Raiffa, Chapter III.

[25]We make no attempt to give all the interesting variations. For the more dramatic departures from Prisoner's Dilemma see Dean Pruit, "Reward Structure and Cooperation: The Decomposed Prisoner's Dilemma Game," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 7 (1967), pp. 21-27; Henry Hamburger, "Separable Games," Behavioral Science, 14 (1969), pp. 121-132; and Amnon Rapoport and Nancy Cole, "Experimental Studies of Interdependent Mixed-Motive Games," Behavioral Science, 13 (1968), pp. 189-204.

[26]Kellogg Wilson and Edwin Bixenstine, "Forms of Social Control in Two-Person, Two-Choice Games," Behavioral Science, 7 (1962), p. 99.

[27]Schelling, pp. 199-201.

[28]Anatol Rapoport and Albert Chammah, "The Game of Chicken," American Behavioral Scientist, 10 (November, 1966), pp. 23-28.

[29]Erving Goffman, Strategic Interaction, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).

[30]Marshall McLuhan, War and Peace in the Global Village, (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 173.

[31]Anatol Rapoport, Fights, Games and Debates, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 360.